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**Wild animals and poor people: Conflicts between conservation and human  
needs in Citawan (Nepal)**

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sions of the tales including situation, expressional language nuances, changes in wording and the portions which provide either humour, mockery or social

comment. They are of great value in portraying personal identity in multi-ethnic Nepalese society.

## Wild Animals and Poor people: Conflicts between Conservation and Human Needs in Citawan (Nepal)

Ulrike Muller-Boker

### From the "Fever Hell" to the "Melting pot" of Nepal

Citawan, the largest of the broad valleys within the Śiwālik Range was only sparsely populated until the middle of this century. Difficult of access, the region was infested with malaria (Haffner, 1979:51ff.). During the period of Nepal's political isolation (1816-1950) the interests of the government were consciously geared to preserving this protective zone of forests, grasslands and swamps, all the more so for constituting one of the best territories for hunting big game. It seems that the autochthonous inhabitants of Citawan, the majority of whom are Tharus, lived relatively undisturbed, in this peripheral region despite the presence of the state and disposed of sufficient arable land and forest.

With the eradication of malaria - Citawan having been largely free of malaria since 1964 - and the turnabout in Nepal's political orientation to the outside world, the situation changed drastically. A large and still continuing flow of immigrants from the mountains (Pahāriyas) entered Citawan, promoted by planned resettlement programmes (Kansakar, 1979; Conway & Shrestha, 1985), causing the population to increase thirteenfold since 1920. Where in 1953 only 19 people shared one sq.km, there are today about 120. Since the late 1970s the main thoroughfare

from Kathmandu to India goes through the Nārāyaṇi and Rāpti valleys. This in turn brought many bazar-settlements into being, the most important of which is Nārāyaṇhāt.

In sum, Citawan has developed in less than a half century from a sparsely populated periphery to an attractive multi-ethnic center.

### Citawan as Wildlife Heritage

During the Rāṇā period (1846 - 1950) Citawan was declared a "private hunting reserve" of the Maharajas due to its richness in big game, being the arena of elaborate hunts, to which the royalties of the world were invited (Kinloch, 1885; Oldfield, 1880/1974: 210ff.).

For example - for the visit of King George V of Great Britain in 1911 600 elephants were employed, and 39 tigers, 18 rhinos, four bears and several leopards were shot within eleven days. All records were broken by a hunt in 1938/39, in which the Viceroy of India took part. The bag included 120 tigers, 38 rhinos, 27 leopards and 15 bears (K.K. Gurung, 1983:2f.).

After the downfall of the Rāṇā regime hunting and poaching increased dramatically. Dealing in particular in rhino horn became a lucrative business (Stracey, 1957: 766). Poachers came from India and from the hills, but also new settlers were responsible for the decimation of the *Rhinoceros unicornis*

population from c. 1,000 (1953) to c. 100 (1966) (Gee, 1959; Spillet, 1967). The ever-expanding settlement area - H. Gurung (1986) estimated that between 1961 and 1977 49% of Citawan's forests were transformed into fields - led at the same time to a constant reduction in wildlife habitats.

An initial attempt was made in 1964/65 to bring back the rhinoceros from the brink of extinction. A "Rhino Sanctuary" was established; 22,000 squatters and 4,000 long-resident farmers were removed from the territory and the area south of the Rāpti and between Nārāyaṇi and Lothar Kholā was "cleared" from settlers with the exception of a few old Tharu villages (Spillet, 1967: 567).

An effective ecotope conservation management succeeded only in the beginning of the 70es. IUCN and the World Wildlife Fund launched a tiger project. Efforts to save the tiger, sitting at the apex of the food chain and needing considerable territory to survive - so the idea goes - necessarily required preservation of a large habitat (Mishra, 1990:14). In 1973 an area of 544 sq.km was declared a national park and put under strict protection. In 1977 the territory was extended to cover 932 sq.km. The Parsa Wildlife Reserve, comprising 499 sq.km was annexed by the Citawan National Park in 1988. In recognition of its richness in flora and fauna, of which some are considered endangered species, the UNESCO declared the park a World Heritage Natural Site (Jefferies & Mishra 1991:26).

These conservation measures led to a stabilization of the *Rhinoceros unicornis* population at the level of 350 animals: the annual net increase of five animals allowed meanwhile the re-

moval of rhinos to other national parks. The differentiated structure of ecotopes in the park supports, besides the rhinos, a wide spectrum of mammals (e.g. the endangered gaur and the Gangetic dolphin), reptiles (gharial crocodile and marsh mugger), amphibians, birds, fishes and insects. Thirty-five to forty tigers (*Panthera tigris tigris*) were counted in the last year. Edds (1986) recorded 113 fish species in the waters of the park, and 486 bird species were registered in Citawan up until 1988 (Jefferies & Mishra, 1991:174ff.). Without any doubt, the Royal Citawan National Park is today one of the most important national parks in all of Asia and a great attraction for tourists.

The situation, seen from "the other side of the fence" and protected by 1,000 armed soldiers, stands in stark contrast, however, with this ecologically positive picture.

### Traditional Exploitation in Conflict with Ecological Concerns

The protected forests and grasslands of Citawan, together with rivers and streams, are not only a potential reserve of arable land, but also of pasturage for large herds of cattle. Additionally this area provided hunting, fishing and gathering grounds; plus firewood and the raw materials necessary for the construction of houses and domestic tools.

The Tharus who traditionally settled this area, practised a short fallow shifting cultivation (2-4 years rice cultivation; 3-12 years fallow). After the allocation of land titles by the government, shifting cultivation was prohibited and the Tharus had to change to permanent farming thus necessitating regular manuring. The forest had been the most important pasturage for the

Tharu. With the establishment of the National Park and the prohibition of grazing in the forest, the number of cattle declined drastically, in some villages by 80%. The animals starved to death. The farmer now face a lack of dung and of working animals. Because of problems in collecting firewood - it has to be stolen - more and more dung is used as fuel. The increase in the population of wildlife has caused the Tharu to suffer loss of harvest and of livestock for which there is no compensation. The regular collection of edible and medicinal plants, of materials for making houses and household items, has become nearly impossible (Müller-Böker, 1991a).

It is the Tharus in particular who have been greatly affected by the loss of access to land extensively used in the past. In the face of their immediate problems of survival, one can understand why they close their ears to arguments supporting the preservation of a biotope and the protection of endangered wildlife. For the Tharus the forest is not only an important economic resource, it is also their form of economy, their way of life and cultural identity (Müller-Böker, 1991b:112). For them it is hard to accept the ideas of Western ecologists who see the forest and savannas as a living space for wild animals only, one in which the Tharus no longer have a place.

The ecologically sensible decision to protect and conserve vast areas of Citawan contradicts the infrastructural development and the opening of the region to people from the outside. The Tharus are the victims of a twofold dispossession. Only a conservation management which involves the needs of the local population, providing them with effective support, can counter the growing impoverishment and criminal-

ization of the autochthonous inhabitants and prevent illegal encroachment on the protected areas.

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## INTERVIEW

### Reorientation at the Royal Nepal Academy: An interview with Vice-Chancellor Prof. Isvar Baral Martin Gaenszle

He refused to go to Princeton in the late fifties, because this would have committed him to the School of International Studies (SIS) in New Delhi, which had arranged for the scholarship, for a further five years - and he intended to go back to Nepal. The political changes in 1960, however, put an end to this plan, so he went to London to get his Ph.D. from SOAS and eventually stayed in Delhi, where he taught south Asian politics and the history of modern Nepal at the SIS (Jawaharlal Nehru University) for what came to be 34 years. For a long time he had been in the bad books of the

Panchayat system because of his democratic credentials, but last summer, after the restoration of multi-party democracy, when Prof. Isvar Baral came - as usual - to his home country for vacation, he was made Vice-Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy. (The post of Chancellor has remained vacant since the restructuring of the Academy).

When he wrote his doctoral thesis on *The Life and Writings of Prithvi Narayan Shah* in London under the supervision of the late T.W. Clark, he used the archives of the India Office Library and became - as he recounted - "the first